

Important Features of the Elderly Population in Sri Lanka

H.R. Anulawathie Menike

Senior Lecturer

Department of Economics,

University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

E-mail: anulamenike@yahoo.com

In the last few decades, Sri Lanka has experienced major demographic changes. Especially the Sri Lankan population's structure age wise has witnessed a significant change. Many Asian countries have already begun to experience rapid ageing of their population. Declining fertility and increasing longevity are resulting in ageing of population in both developed and developing countries which need serious attention of the governments. Among the South Asian countries, in Sri Lanka relatively large proportions of the population are elderly. The projected population in the country shows that the population will suffer major changes in its size and age structure in the coming decades. This study has highlighted the important features of the elderly population in Sri Lanka. The study shows that the size and share of the elderly group would increase rapidly. Another very important feature of population ageing in Sri Lanka is that the oldest age category (75+) is increasing than the young age category (60-74) among the elderly group. Further, the ageing process is the rising number of women in the older age group than number of men. Women are expected to outnumber men in the old ages due to higher life expectancy among females. Consequently, the number of widows is likely to increase in the future and is expected to live longer which is already happening in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the policy makers are really worried about the rapid ageing of the country's population since this will affect heavily on the economy of Sri Lanka.

[Key Words: *Age structure, ageing population, Demographic transition, Economy, Sri Lanka.*]

The dynamics of population deals with the determinants and consequences of changes in the structure, growth and distribution of population over time. The structure of population is the distribution of a given population by age and sex. The nature of the changing age structure of the population during the demographic transition (from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality) has various social and economic implications (Navaneetham 2002). Thus, declining fertility and increasing longevity are resulting in ageing population in both developed and developing countries which need serious attention of the governments. Successes in reproductive health and family planning programmes and improvements in health care services have contributed towards population ageing by enabling survival.

Moreover, population ageing in developing countries is taking place at a much faster pace than it did in developed world. Sri Lanka is the first country in South Asia to reach replacement level fertility and achieve low levels of infant mortality and high life expectancy. These positive demographic trends have brought about changes in the population age structure where the elderly population over 60 years is growing faster than the child population under five years of age (Mendis 2007).

Currently, Sri Lanka has entered the third stage of demographic transition (Atthanayake 1984). As a result of that Sri Lanka has very high elderly population among the South Asian countries and also it is being continued fast. In 1946, when Sri Lanka took its first post-Second World War census, the population age structure was relatively young, with about 37 percent of the total population being under 15 years of age. This proportion, however, increased to nearly 42 percent in 1963 and thereafter gradually declined to 35 percent at the census taken in 1981 (Abeykoon 1996). According to the census in 2001, a further reduction of those, under 15 years of age has lowered to 26 percent (Department of Census and Statistics, 2001). The changes in percentage of children in a population affect the other age groups of a population. According to the population projections in Sri Lanka, as a result of low fertility, the percentage of population of those below 15 years of age is decreasing and the population percentage of the aged (60+) is increasing (Siddhisena & Ratnayake 1998; De Silva 1994). Thus the recent fertility changes have made a direct impact on the proportion of population below 15 years.

The terms "elderly" differs from country to country. Generally, the Western world, age 65 and above is considered the demarcation age. But, most of the developing world age 60 and above is considered (United Nations, 1998). In Sri Lanka, age 60 and above is considered the demarcation age in identifying the elderly population, since the most common mandatory retirement age in the public and private sectors falls between ages 55 and 60 respectively. According to the table 1, during the past decades in Sri Lanka, there has been a sharp increase in the relative and absolute size of the elderly population. In 1946, there were 360,000 Sri Lankans over 60 years of age comprising 5.4 percent of the total population. By 2001, over 10 percent of the total population or nearly 2 .0 million were over 60 years of age. By 2041 Sri Lanka is expected to have about 28 percent of its population over 60 years. With rising proportion of the elderly population, the dependency burden on the working age population has also been rising (Mendis 2007). The annual growth rate of Age 60+ is higher than that of the growth rate of total population. In 2000, Sri Lanka 1 in 10 people over 60, by 2030 Sri Lanka is expected to nearly 1 in 5 people over 60 (Siddhisena 2004). As one of the fastest aging populations in Asia, Sri Lanka faces the challenge of developing public policies to accommodate this changing age structure. The ageing in Sri Lanka, seems to occur at a lower level of economic development compared with those of western countries (De Silva, Boyagoda and Ranagala 2008). The several socio-economic features can be

identified in Sri Lanka’s ageing population. Therefore, the ageing in the country creates serious problems in the near future. The main purpose of this paper is to identify the main socio-economic features of the elderly population in Sri Lanka.

Data and methodology

This study mainly uses secondary data. The majority of the data comes from literature review, such as, reports of the population censuses, statistical abstracts, and annual reports of the central bank of Sri Lanka. Further, to obtain secondary data reference to available literature and research papers nationally and internationally published, related to the topic of the study. I have used descriptive analysis to examine the main features of the elderly population in Sri Lanka.

Demographic situation of population ageing in Sri Lanka

The ageing of Sri Lanka’s population was primarily motivated by a fertility decline beginning in the 1960s. Currently Sri Lanka is stepping the last stage of demographic transition. As a result of the demographic transition, the ageing population in the country is increasing rapidly. After the 2nd world war as a result of the steady decrease of the fertility rate in the population, and an increase in the life expectation, one could see a continue rate of increase in the ageing population. A striking feature here is the ratio of the increase of ageing population has been more than the annual increase of population in the country. The highest percentage of its increase is expected to occur within the period 2011-2021 (Table 1). By that time the population of the working age population will gradually decrease and the aging population of the country will increase. These trends are obviously indicated that changes of the population pyramid of Sri Lanka in the future.

Table 1 Growth of elderly and the total population in Sri Lanka

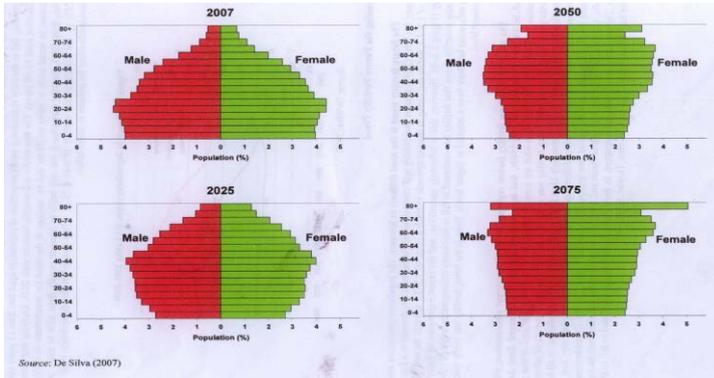
Year	Population(Thousands)		Percentage as a total population	Annual growth rate	
	Total	Aged 60+	Age 60+	Total population	Aged 60+
1946	6657	360	5.4	-	-
1953	8098	437	5.4	2.80	2.81
1963	10582	621	5.9	2.63	3.41
1971	12690	807	6.3	2.22	3.20
1981	14847	986	6.6	1.67	2.10
1991	17015	1393	8.1	1.36	3.45
2001	19186	1916	9.9	1.20	3.10
*2011	21114	2765	13.1	0.96	3.67
*2021	22375	3997	17.8	0.58	3.69
*2031	22778	5103	22.4	0.18	2.44
*2041	22697	6305	27.8	-0.03	2.12

*Estimated. Source: De Silva and Samarasekara, 1999

Population pyramids of Sri Lanka

Population pyramids are generally a good way to depict the age and gender distribution of a population. Four population pyramids from 2007, 2025, 2050 and 2075 show the age structure of the population at those times. The base population has begun to shrink due to reduced infant mortality and a decline in total fertility rate in the last decades.

Population age pyramids in Sri Lanka 2007 - 2075



Source: De Silva, 2007

During the early years, the age pyramids were expanding type, that is broad-based, indicating high birth rates and decreasing death rates. The shape of the pyramid has now changed with a smaller base reflecting changes in the age structure. Accordingly, as a result of the elderly population growing faster with compared to growth of the child population, the broad-based population pyramid is transforming into a “barrel shape” or “cylindrical shape” one.

In the South Asian context, Sri Lanka is unique both in the present process of ageing as well as in its future. In 2000, 1 in 10 people over 60, whilst Afghanistan and India have 1 in 21 and 13 people respectively (Siddhisena 2004). By 2031, Sri Lanka is expected to have 22 percent of its population aged over 60 or nearly 1 in 5, while other countries are expected to have somewhat lower rates, such as Afghanistan with 1 in 18 people and India with 1 in 7. This remarkable difference in ageing population and the rapidly of ageing is also witnessed in the median age in the South Asian countries. The highest median age was recorded in 2001 and 2030 in Sri Lanka and it was considerably increased from 28.8 in 2001 to 39.5 in 2031.

Age structure of the population in Sri Lanka

Like many developed countries in the world, Sri Lanka also has successfully attempted to reduce the rate of mortality and fertility. Through the decrease of the rate of fertility, the child population has decreased and through the decrease of the rate of mortality, the life expectation of the people has been increased. As a result of this, in Sri Lanka gradually the signs of an ageing

population arise. In the table 2, notice the behaviour of age structure in Sri Lanka.

Table 2 Age structure of the population in Sri Lanka 1946-2071

Year	Age Groups		
	0-14	15-59	60+
1946	37.2	57.4	5.4
1963	41.5	52.5	5.9
1971	39.0	54.7	6.3
1981	35.3	58.1	6.6
2001	26.3	64.5	9.2
*2011	22.8	64.7	12.5
*2021	19.4	63.8	16.7
*2031	16.1	63.2	20.7
*2041	15.2	60.0	24.8
*2051	14.9	56.2	28.8
*2061	14.4	54.3	31.3
*2071	14.8	52.0	33.3

*Estimated. Source: De Silva, 2012

As depicted in table 2, the proportion of the population under 15 years declining gradually. These changes are happening due to fertility changes in the reproductive age groups during the past years. Together with the decrease in the under 15 population an increase in the older age groups is observed.

Important features of the ageing population in the country

Old- Old category (oldest age category) is increasing rapidly

Generally, in Sri Lanka, people who are between the age years 60 and 74 are considered "young elderly" and those who are over 75 years are called "old elderly". The people known as the "young elderly" or young old could do their work by themselves and also will be able to contribute to useful social work. In society, persons over 75 are "old elderly" or "old old" and they require mostly social protection. In the Sri Lankan population, too are notices the trend that those were 75 years of age are on the increase. Accordingly to the statistics

table 3, another complex problem we have got to face is the increase of the "old-old" category in the Sri Lankan population.

Table 3 Distribution of elderly by age 1971-2041 (as a % of total elderly)

Year	60-74 Yrs	75+ Yrs
1971	80.5	19.5
1981	78.9	21.1
1991	78.8	21.2
2001	76.3	23.7
*2011	75.9	24.1
*2021	75.8	24.2
*2031	70.1	29.9
*2041	67.2	32.8
*2071	60.3	39.7

* Estimated. Sources: Reports of Census of Population; De Silva, 1994, 2007

According to the table given above, of the total aged population in 1971, there were 80.5 of persons between 60 - 64 years of age. By 1991 it was reduced to 78.8 and in 2071 it will rapidly decrease up to 60.3 according to estimates. But the "old elderly" population takes a different direction. Of the total population of the aged persons those over 75 years (old-old elderly) people 19.5% in 1971 and by 1991 it increased to 21.2%. Also, by 2071 that amount will be nearly 40% according to projections. It reveals then that in the future decades will have to face problems of socio - economic protection of the aging population. Kevin and Victoria (2001) also shown that, after the year 2010, the numbers and proportions of elderly, especially the "oldest old" will rise rapidly in most developed and developing countries.

Rapidly increasing the elderly dependency ratio

The aged dependency ratio, (the number of elderly over 60 years of age per every 100 persons aged 15-59 years) has been increasing dramatically in Sri Lanka (Table 4). Undoubtedly, the significant decline in mortality and the resulting improved survival chances of older people at advanced ages will continue to contribute to the rise in dependency ratios beyond the first half of this century.

Table 4 Dependency ratio in Sri Lanka 1971-2071

Year	Child Dependency Ratio(0-14)/(15-59)	Elderly Dependency Ratio(60+)/(15-59)	Total Dependency Ratio (0-14)+(60+)/ (15-59)
1971	71.3	11.5	82.8
1981	60.5	11.3	71.8
2001	40.7	14.3	55.1
*2011	35.3	19.3	54.6
*2021	30.4	26.2	56.6
*2031	25.5	32.8	58.3
*2041	25.3	41.4	66.7
*2051	26.5	51.2	77.7
*2061	26.5	57.6	84.1
*2071	28.4	64.0	92.3

*Estimated. Source: Dept. of census & statistics, Census reports; De Silva, 2007

While the child dependency ratio is expected to decrease from 71.3% in 1971 to 40.7% by 2001, and be less than 28% around 2071. The old age dependency ratio could rapid increase from about 19% at present to 26% in 2021 and to as much as 64% in 2071. This is the seriousness of the impending ageing population (Sandarathne 2011).

Proportion of the female elderly are increasing rapidly

The main reason for this is the growth of long life expectation of women. This situation can be identified from the data of sex ratio of the population aged 60 and over. According to table 5, sex ratio (Number of males per 100 females) among the elderly population has decreased.

Table 5 Sex ratio of the elderly population in Sri Lanka 1971-2071

Year	Age Group		All 60 +
	60-64	75+	
1971	126.0	106.2	121.8
1981	114.6	107.2	112.9
2001	89.11	84.6	88.05
*2011	85.21	73.7	82.45
*2021	83.74	69.0	80.15
*2031	82.31	67.6	77.90
*2041	82.54	66.7	77.30
*2051	85.69	65.1	78.57
*2061	87.55	66.6	78.88
*2071	87.30	67.2	78.74

*Estimated. Source: Data for 1971-2001 are from the census reports of the Dept. of census and statistics; Data for 2011-2071 are from De Silva 2007

The sex ratio among the elderly population declined from 113 in 1981 to 88 in 2001. It is projected to decrease to 77 by the year 2041. This decline is stronger among the “old-old” groups. The life expectancy of the females are high than males, as such a large numbers of females survive to old age compared to males (De Silva et. al. 2008).

Widowhood is more prevalent among elderly women than men

Among old people in Sri Lanka, there is a large share of widows than widowers. The proportion of widows 60-64 years of age is about five times that of widowers in the same age group (De Silva et. al. 2008). There are three important factors have caused it to happen. The 1st fact is that the woman is younger than her husband, and she lives longer than her husband. According to census reports, the average age that Sri Lanka men and women get married is 24 years and 28 years respectively. The 2nd fact is the high life expectation of women. For an example, in 2011 the life expectancy of men and women was 69 and 78 years respectively. The third fact is that the majority of the widowers get married again unlike the widows (De Silva 1994; Perera 1989; Siddhisena and Ratnayake 1998). Thus in the future, the number of widows may go up and the

government will pay special attention on them and to see to their socio-economic security in society. There are many elderly widows in Sri Lanka who are unable to spend their elderly life successfully as they have no economic or financial benefits. Specially, this situation can be seen among the widows in rural areas.

Index of ageing is growing faster

The ratio of the number of elderly persons to the number of children ((60+) / (0-14)) is defined as the index of ageing. There were only 14 elderly persons for every 100 children in 1963, but in 1991 this number has increased to 26 and it is expected to be as high as 146 in the year 2031 (De Silva and Samarasekara 1999). The index of ageing is useful to measure the ageing process because it defines the structure of the dependent population.

Conclusion

Population ageing is the inevitable result of rising life expectancy and declining fertility. Sri Lanka's population is also ageing, which means that the percentage of the population who is elderly is increasing. This process will continue rapidly in future decades. It implies that both the number of elderly and the percentage of elderly will increase, even though the size of the population will stabilize by 2030. This paper explored the important features of ageing population in Sri Lanka. From the study identified some leading characteristics of the elderly population in the country. Among these features, increasing the oldest age category, rapidly increasing the older age dependency, growth of the female elderly than male elderly, a large share of widows than widowers etc. will become one of the greatest challenges in the coming decades with vast economic, social and other consequences. Sri Lanka is the fastest ageing country in South Asia, with the elderly population posing many challenges. However, the elderly should not be considered as a burden to the society but their valuable experience should be utilized fruitfully and it should be the responsibility of the society and the government.

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